

Improving Low-Performing Schools:

A Study of Kentucky's
Highly Skilled Educator Program



Partnership for Kentucky Schools

Jane L. David

Pamelia Coe

Patricia J. Kannapel

*With the assistance of Joan Mazur
and G. Williamson McDiarmid*

Support for this report and the work on which it is based came from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The report is one of a series produced by the Partnership Professional Development Research Team whose members include Carolyn Witt Jones, G. Williamson McDiarmid, Jane L. David, Thomas B. Corcoran, Patricia J. Kannapel, Pamela Coe, and Joan Mazur. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the funders or the Partnership for Kentucky Schools.

Improving Low-Performing Schools:

A Study of Kentucky's Highly Skilled Educator Program

2003

Jane L. David

Pamelia Coe

Patricia J. Kannapel

*With the assistance of Joan Mazur
and G. Williamson McDiarmid*



Partnership for Kentucky Schools

600 Cooper Drive
Lexington, Kentucky 40502
tel 859.455.9595
fax 859.455.9797
email admin@pfks.org
web www.pfks.org

**Improving Low-Performing Schools:
A Study of Kentucky's Highly Skilled Educator Program**

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Executive Summary | 1 |
| I. Introduction | 3 |
| <i>Background.....</i> | <i>3</i> |
| <i>Evolution of the HSE Program.....</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>Study Design.....</i> | <i>6</i> |
| II. HSE Training, Actions, Reactions | 7 |
| <i>HSE Selection, Training, and Support.....</i> | <i>8</i> |
| <i>What HSEs Do</i> | <i>10</i> |
| <i>Faculty Perceptions of HSEs</i> | <i>13</i> |
| <i>Teachers' Motivation and Expectations</i> | <i>14</i> |
| <i>Summary</i> | <i>17</i> |
| III. HSE Influence and Impact | 17 |
| <i>Curriculum and Instruction.....</i> | <i>18</i> |
| <i>Professional Development.....</i> | <i>19</i> |
| <i>Leadership/School Organization.....</i> | <i>21</i> |
| <i>Test Scores</i> | <i>22</i> |
| <i>Suggestions for Improvements</i> | <i>24</i> |
| <i>Summary</i> | <i>25</i> |
| IV. Conclusions and Policy Implications..... | 26 |
| <i>The HSE Program is successful</i> | <i>26</i> |
| <i>Progress continues in overcoming challenges to long-term success.....</i> | <i>27</i> |
| <i>More guidance and support to schools can increase HSE effectiveness.....</i> | <i>30</i> |
| <i>The HSE program has implications for all Kentucky schools.....</i> | <i>32</i> |
| References..... | 34 |
| Endnotes..... | 35 |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the pressure mounts for states to find ways to improve low-performing schools, Kentucky's lengthy history with the Distinguished Educator (DE) and Highly Skilled Educator (HSE) programs provides lessons that can inform policymakers and educators across the country. Unusual among states in its emphasis on assistance, Kentucky's HSE program places fulltime, highly-trained experienced educators in the lowest-performing schools for two years. This report presents the findings of research on the HSE program conducted during the 2001-2002 school year under the sponsorship of the Partnership for Kentucky Schools as a follow-up to our earlier study of the DE program. Our findings are based primarily on case studies of 11 of the 45 schools across the state with HSEs and on interviews with HSEs and Kentucky of Department Education (KDE) staff.

Ten years after its inception, the HSE program is still able to attract well-qualified candidates and to provide training and support valued by the HSEs. Their work in schools, guided by the Scholastic Audit, spans school leadership and planning, professional development, test preparation, curriculum alignment, and instructional practices. How they allocate their time across the many areas varies by school need and HSE background.

In general, we found that schools welcomed assistance from HSEs and held their HSEs in high regard. Unlike their earlier DE counterparts, HSEs do not have the authority to evaluate staff which appears to have an overall positive effect; that is, HSEs tend to be viewed as a benefit, not as a threat. At the same time, perceived pressure from test-score accountability remains strong. Although teachers still tend to explain low test scores in terms of student and family characteristics, they attribute major changes in these very characteristics—and in curriculum and

instruction—to the HSE, especially at the elementary level. Many teachers and principals are skeptical that all students will reach proficiency by 2014, reflecting a mixture of low expectations for students and a realistic appraisal of the distance many children must travel, given where they start.

Teachers credit HSEs with helping them better prepare students for the state assessment by creating opportunities to practice test-taking, embedding assessment-like activities into the curriculum, and improving alignment of the curriculum with the assessment. Teachers also point to the HSEs' influence on instruction, leading to better and more deliberate instructional strategies, at least for those teachers with whom HSEs spend time. HSEs tend to target their attention to teachers in the tested grades. Faculties also credit HSEs with strengthening school leadership. These influences are reported by a majority of teachers at all levels, and by almost all at the elementary level.

Professional development is significantly strengthened as a result of the HSE's presence. HSEs both organized and delivered professional development deemed more relevant to teachers' needs and created a more systematic and coordinated approach to teacher learning by embedding professional development in team, department, and faculty meetings. Faculty also credited HSEs with improving morale, creating a shared focus on student learning, and increasing collaboration among teachers.

The HSE program is successful, as measured both by evidence of changes inside schools and by its primary goal of increasing CATS scores. None of the 45 schools in the 2000-2002 cycle remained in the lowest third of low-performing schools (the criterion for receiving assistance) after a two-year HSE intervention. HSE schools gained twice as much as non-HSE schools overall; almost all

of this difference in gains occurred at the elementary level. In addition, ten percent more HSE schools reached their CATS goal than did the rest of the schools in the state.

The HSE intervention is not a panacea for all struggling schools. It is clearly more successful at the elementary level. The program is also more successful in schools that already have some leadership and organizational capacity to improve. Schools with the most severe problems with faculty morale, school leadership, and district support—which tend to be in the most economically depressed areas—are still struggling after two years. Among the additional challenges still faced by the HSE program is the limited attention HSEs can pay to helping teachers improve instruction, given the competing demands on their time. HSEs also need more support from district and school leadership. Nonetheless, most schools have made great strides and have implemented structures and routines that hold promise for continuing improvement. Whether this promise can be realized after the HSE has left is still a question for many schools which have just begun on the path to improvement.

The effectiveness of the HSE program will continue to increase to the extent that the work is embedded in a larger system of guidance and support for teachers and students. Two years of intervention—or even three or four—are unlikely to launch a school on a course of continuous improvement in the absence of ongoing guidance and support from the district and the state. Our findings point to four areas in which such guidance and support might be strengthened: (1) provide more guidance on curricula that are aligned with state goals and the Core Content for Assessment; (2) offer more and better learning opportunities for students who need extra time and instruction; (3) continue to build links across the various state programs aimed at school improvement; and (4) refine the accountability system to

emphasize assistance and incorporate more measures of progress.

The HSE program has already had a significant impact across the state. It has spawned two programs to improve school leadership: the Kentucky Leadership Academy open to all principals and the Kentucky Principals' Network linking principals in low-performing schools. The HSE program laid the groundwork for the Scholastic Audit that assesses school effectiveness. It has also created a statewide network of highly trained educators. Together with Regional Service Center staff, former DEs and HSEs provide an exceptional resource. In addition, the evolution of the program serves as a model of state policymaking that exemplifies continuous learning. Each year KDE staff improve the program based on what they have learned from prior years

Given the structure of Kentucky's accountability system, the HSE program brings hope and promise to schools that are substantially below the state's expectations. In contrast to many other states, the scope and quality of the HSE intervention turns what would otherwise be a punitive set of sanctions into assistance that is appreciated and has a positive impact on low-performing schools.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, almost all states have adopted standards and created some form of test-based accountability. One result is the identification of schools that fail to meet standards or improvement targets set by the state. States now face the challenge of figuring out how to help these schools improve. Pressure to assist these low-performing schools is intensified by the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. This legislation requires states accepting Title I funds to identify and assist schools that fail to meet the state's definition of adequate yearly progress.

"No Child Left Behind" follows Kentucky's school reform legislation, based on the philosophy that "all children can learn," by 12 years. In those 12 years Kentucky has been a national leader in setting expectations for school progress and in efforts to build the capacity of its educators to help all children reach standards. Kentucky's reforms provide substantial funding for professional development and intervention in schools that fail to meet state performance expectations. In fact, Kentucky is currently one of only two states that directly provides intensive help through selecting, training, and assigning full-time professionals (called Highly Skilled Educators) to each school that qualifies for such help. And it is the only one to fund at least two years of fulltime assistance. The vast majority of states offer only a modicum of direct assistance or some additional funds for schools to purchase help on their own.

As the pressure mounts for states to create effective mechanisms for assisting low-performing schools, Kentucky's decade-long history with such interventions provides lessons that can inform current deliberations across the nation. This report presents the results of a study of the Highly Skilled Educator (HSE) program. The study was conducted during the 2001-2002 school year under the sponsorship of the Partnership for

Kentucky Schools with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts. The study parallels the research team's earlier investigation of the Distinguished Educator (DE) program, the precursor of the HSE program, conducted from 1997-99 (David, Kannapel & McDiarmid, 2000). Both of these strands of research are part of a broader research agenda carried out over the last six years, designed to understand the extent to which Kentucky's policies and investments in professional development are paying off.¹

Background

Kentucky's landmark reform, the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), became law in 1990. One of the first high-stakes, standards-based reform laws in the nation, KERA recognized from its inception the need to improve schools' capacities to help all students achieve high standards. KERA has paid increasing attention to that need, including substantial funding for professional development for teachers and administrators. From the beginning, KERA's accountability measures have included the provision of intensive, school-based assistance to schools that fall short of state testing goals.

Our earlier research found that professional development under KERA had increased and improved substantially.² However, much professional development focused on procedures and generic practices, with few opportunities to delve deeply into particular subject areas. The structure of most professional development remained as short workshops usually held away from the school site with little in the way of school-based learning opportunities for teachers (McDiarmid et. al., 1997). Over time, professional development opportunities continued to expand into new areas, including curriculum and instruction, and to reach new audiences, including school and district administrators. Many of these new opportunities

provided more extended time for teachers to learn, and some were designed to be school-based or to provide follow-up support to teachers. Nevertheless, the need for these learning opportunities has far outstripped the supply (Corcoran et. al., 2001).

Our interest in the Distinguished Educator (DE) program and later the Highly Skilled Educator (HSE) program as a promising form of intensive professional development stemmed from these findings. We posited that the long-term success of a state assistance program would rest on its ability to build the capacity of school faculties to improve curriculum and instruction, and that one major piece of this would be to strengthen the role professional development plays in these schools. So our research asked not only whether the program succeeded in meeting the immediate goal of increasing student achievement as measured by the state assessment over two years, but also whether it would leave a legacy of increased capacity to continue nascent improvement efforts.³

Our study of the DE program from 1997-1999 uncovered a range of benefits (David, Kannapel, & McDiarmid, 2000). We found that after the initial embarrassment of being assigned a DE, most schools developed a positive relationship with their DEs and found his/her assistance highly constructive. DEs helped schools unify behind a common focus on school improvement, and test results showed positive effects. We also identified areas for improvement, including the desirability of assigning one full-time DE to a school instead of one or more part-time DEs, and the need for assistance at the district level. Consistent with its own feedback, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) incorporated these and other changes into the redesigned HSE program.

In 2001, we undertook a follow-up study of the HSE program to investigate how the intervention had changed since the DE

program, and to study the influence and impact of the program on school practices and student outcomes. This report presents our findings, beginning with some background on the evolution of the HSE program, followed by a description of our study design, and then findings of the research.

Evolution of the HSE Program

Under Kentucky's original accountability system, passed in 1990, schools were required to show a specified level of improvement every two years toward an ultimate goal of "proficiency" over a 20-year period. Improvement was measured by changes in each school's "accountability index." The index was a single score representing a composite of state assessment results and non-cognitive indicators, including attendance rate, dropout rate, and retention rate. Schools where indices declined from one biennium to the next would be eligible for assistance from Distinguished Educators. Those where accountability indices declined by five points or more were designated "in crisis." In these schools DEs had the authority to evaluate and recommend the dismissal of certified staff.

This strategy required building a cadre of Distinguished Educators to carry out the work and setting the expectations of the schools for assistance. The state moved carefully, first developing a skilled core group and delaying the use of the "crisis" label until the 1996-98 biennium. During the first biennium 1990-92, seven DEs were hired and placed on sabbatical from their school districts to assist in the design of the program. In 1993-94, 43 DEs were added to the original group and trained throughout the year. They worked in 53 schools during the 1994-96 biennium. All of these schools showed gains on the state assessment, and 34 met or exceeded their goal.

In 1996-98 the "in crisis" label was used for the first time. Nine schools were identified

as crisis schools, and each was assigned two fulltime DEs for two years. DEs had the authority to formally evaluate school staff and recommend dismissal, although none recommended dismissal during the period of our study. Typically one DE focused on evaluation and the other on assistance. An additional 79 schools “in decline” received part-time assistance from DEs; some help was also provided 90 schools that had improved during the preceding biennium but did not meet their goal. Across all these 178 schools, 167 improved their scores (and 85 exceeded their goal), as did 46 of the original 53 schools.

The DE program was redesigned in 1998, largely because the state assessment and accountability system was reconfigured, which required establishing a new baseline and expected growth for each school. In the redesign, the state made several changes based on experience with the DE program. For instance, the accountability system originally called for assistance to any school with declining scores, which meant a relatively high performing school could qualify for DE help. This unusual and controversial aspect of the program, though consistent with the goal of continuous improvement, was not politically popular. Hence one change in the HSE program was to focus on low-performing schools.

In shifting its focus to low-performing schools, the state defined three levels of assistance based on performance. Under the current assessment and accountability system, all Kentucky schools have the goal of reaching the “proficient” level (reflected by an accountability index of 100) on the state assessment by the year 2014.⁴ KDE determines how much progress each school must make to reach a score of 100 by 2014 (a “goal line”) and defines what it considers to be insufficient progress (an “assistance line”). Schools that fall below the “assistance line” are divided into three levels. Level 3 schools (the lowest performing) receive a Scholastic Audit (see page 6), school

improvement funds, and the assistance of a full-time HSE for two years. Level 2 and Level 1 schools also qualify for school improvement funds. Level 2 schools receive a Scholastic Review, and Level 1 schools conduct a self-review using the audit tool.

Although Level 2 and Level 1 schools are not assigned HSEs the focus of the work in the eight Regional Service Centers (RSCs) is to assist these schools. With small staffs and large numbers of schools, RSCs, which are regional branches of the state education agency, are not able to provide nearly the intensity of assistance that Level 3 schools receive.

Several other changes marked the shift from the DE to the HSE program. One was to remove the evaluative and dismissal authority of the HSEs during the transition from the old to the new assessment system. The legislature is expected to consider re-instituting this authority in some form by 2004. Another shift was to assign HSEs to work with central office staff in districts with more than one low-performing school.

In 1998-2000, low-performing schools were not assigned HSEs but could volunteer to receive assistance from an HSE who would act in an advisory capacity. Of 73 eligible schools, 66 volunteered. In the 2000-2002 biennium, 45 schools were designated as Level 3 schools. Again, schools could choose to decline the assistance during this transition period from the old to the new accountability system, but none did. HSEs were assigned to all 45 schools and to two districts with several Level 3 schools.

During the shift from the DE to the HSE program the state also introduced a new school diagnostic instrument, the Scholastic Audit, which was based on the School Transformation and Assistance Renewal (STAR) Tool Kit developed by DEs to guide their work. When the program was revamped

in 1998, the STAR Tool Kit evolved into the Standards and Indicators for School Improvement Tool Kit which forms the heart of the Scholastic Audit (also called the Scholastic Review when used voluntarily in Level 1 or Level 2 schools).

The Scholastic Audit, a weeklong process, is conducted by a state-trained external team prior to the arrival of the HSE. Its results form the basis for the school's "consolidated plan"; a state-wide, two-year plan for school improvement, which in turn guides the work of the HSE. The Audit assesses school performance and makes recommendations for improvement in the areas of:

- Curriculum
- Classroom evaluation and assessment
- Instruction
- School culture
- Student, family, and community support
- Professional growth, development, and evaluation
- Leadership
- Organizational structure and beliefs
- Comprehensive and effective planning.

The Audit instrument lists multiple indicators under each of these nine standards as a basis for assessment.

Additional changes are being implemented in the 2002-2004 biennium, following the completion of our data collection. These include closer coordination between the HSEs and the RSC staff to increase the expertise available to both, and plans to make available a broader range of support from additional KDE staff. Both are intended to lead to the concept of service teams, whose members possess a range of expertise that can be drawn upon as needed.

Study Design

The goal of the research was to find out the extent to which the HSE program is successful in helping low-performing schools build their capacity to improve student performance, and how it compares to its predecessor DE program. We wanted to understand (1) how HSEs are selected, trained, and supported in their work; (2) how HSEs are received at schools; (3) what they do at the schools; and (4) how their work influences schools. We also explored contextual factors that might explain the influence and impact of the HSE, as well as strengths and weaknesses of the program.

The cornerstone of the research design was a series of one-day site visits to 11 of the 45 Level 3 schools in January and February 2002 to interview staff and administer a survey. Study schools were selected to offer a range of geographic distribution, rural and urban sites, school levels (elementary, middle, and high schools), and to include schools in districts that had more than one Level 3 school (see Table 1).

During the school visits, we interviewed the principal and as many faculty members as time permitted (six per school on average). We requested specifically to interview members of the school-based decision making council, the professional development coordinator, and teachers at tested grade levels. We also administered surveys to all faculty members in conjunction with the school visits. Surveys were typically administered at faculty meetings on the day we visited, or placed in faculty mailboxes the morning of our visit and collected at the end of the day. This resulted in a high response rate of 78 percent. We interviewed the HSEs serving each school either on the day of the visit, or by phone after the school visit.⁵

TABLE 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL SAMPLE 2001-2002

| School | Level | Geog. Area | Urban/ Mid-sized/Rural | Enrollment | Percent FRL | Percent Minority | No. of teachers |
|--------|---------|------------|------------------------|------------|-------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Elem | South | Rural | 450 | 82 | < 1 | 26 |
| 2 | Elem | North | Mid-sized | 300 | 85 | 25 | 24 |
| 3 | Elem | Central | Urban | 300 | 80 | 50 | 22 |
| 4 | Elem/MS | East | Rural | 150 | 90 | < 1 | 12 |
| 5 | Elem | West | Mid-sized | 450 | 80 | 20 | 30 |
| 6 | Middle | Central | Urban | 900 | 65 | 35 | 50 |
| 7 | Middle | North | Mid-sized | 750 | 70 | 27 | 37 |
| 8 | Middle | West | Mid-sized | 600 | 60 | 30 | 30 |
| 9 | Middle | Central | Rural | 350 | 84 | < 1 | 28 |
| 10 | Middle | East | Rural | 300 | 90 | < 1 | 25 |
| 11 | High | Central | Urban | 500 | 69 | 49 | 40 |

The surveys used a subset of the items included on the earlier DE survey to enable comparison. However, the low response rate on the DE survey coupled with significant differences in the sample makes direct comparisons risky. The DE schools were not all low-performing; they had assistance that ranged from part time to two per school and were distributed quite differently across elementary, middle, and high school. Instead of reporting DE survey results in tables, we make reference to patterns in the DE survey data in the text.

In conjunction with school visits, we reviewed relevant school documents, as time permitted. These documents included school performance reports from the state assessment, consolidated plans, and scholastic audit reports.

To learn more about state administration of the program, we conducted interviews with Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) staff who oversee and manage the HSE program, and reviewed the KDE web site and documents related to the HSE program. In addition, we analyzed anonymous responses from 37 HSEs to questions about their experiences asked of

them by KDE staff. These data were provided to us with no identifying information.

II. HSE TRAINING, ACTIONS, REACTIONS

As is true with any ambitious state intervention, the HSE program raises questions about its impact relative to its cost, whether it is possible to maintain high standards of quality in HSE selection year after year, and whether its effects are discernable and lasting. In general, we found schools welcomed the assistance and held their HSEs in high regard. Compared to our earlier study of DEs, we observed no decrease in the high standards used to select HSEs. In addition, respondents in schools served by HSEs found their presence as much or more beneficial than had their counterparts in schools served by DEs.

Below we describe how HSEs are selected, trained, and supported. We then describe what HSEs do in the schools, and overall reactions of faculty to them. Finally, we look at reasons educators cite to explain their school's decline in test scores, which of these factors were

influenced by the HSEs, and their expectations for student progress. These findings set up the next section of the report, which looks at the influence and impact of the HSEs.

HSE Selection, Training, and Support

The HSE program rests on the skills and knowledge of those who become HSEs. Hence, how HSEs are selected and trained is critical. If the process is not one that produces 'highly skilled' educators year after year, the program is unlikely to be effective. Because HSEs work independently, one per school, in a demanding and often stressful job, they also need sources of support that include access to information and help as well as interactions with peers. Our findings produce high marks on HSE selection and support and generally positive reactions to HSE training. The fear that the quality of applicants would decline over time has not happened to date.

Selection of HSEs. The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), at the time of this research, was engaged in the tenth round of DE/HSE selection since the passage of KERA. Administrators and teachers with the following qualifications may apply to be an HSE:

- At least five years teaching experience (10 years preferred);
- Possession of a Kentucky teaching certificate;
- At least three years of current experience in Kentucky as an educator;
- Master's degree (preferred) in an education-related field.

Roughly 100 educators apply for 30-50 HSE positions each year. The selection process takes about a year and involves multiple steps, including an initial oral interview and written assessment, performance event, site visit and portfolio presentation, and participation in weekend training sessions. Applicants are screened out after each step, with selected

applicants advancing to the next step until a final decision is made in May as to which applicants will be in the next HSE cohort or cadre. KDE staff who oversee the HSE program, as well as HSEs who were interviewed as part of this research, described the selection process as rigorous, intensive, and excellent training in its own right. Similarly, faculty at the study schools frequently identified the selection of highly qualified and knowledgeable educators to serve as HSEs as one of the strengths of the HSE program.

HSEs remain employees of and continue to receive their salary (with no loss of benefits) through their home school districts. They receive 135 percent of their current salary adjusted for 12 months' employment. Salaries are capped at \$90,000, which may discourage some administrators from applying. Of the 59 HSEs available for assignment in 2000-2001, two-thirds were teachers and the rest evenly split between principals and central office administrators. Assignment of HSEs to schools is based on the HSE's background and, if possible, the geographic location of the school in relation to where the HSE lives.

HSE training. After the selection process, those selected as HSEs participate in a two-week summer training program. Some attempt has been made to differentiate training, depending on the skills and background of HSEs, but for the most part, all HSEs receive the same training.

HSEs we interviewed identified a number of topics on which they had received training, including state initiatives such as the Scholastic Audit; school-based decision-making councils; Consolidated Plans, and preparing for, administering, and analyzing data from the state assessment. Presenters on these topics have typically been KDE staff and former DEs/HSEs.

In addition, HSEs receive training on a number of broader education topics from national education consultants. For the 2000-2002 cadre, the topics included:

- Working with children from poverty, based on the work of Ruby K. Payne;
- Multiple intelligences and learning styles, based on the work of Harvey K. Silver, Richard W. Strong, Matthew J. Perini;
- Professional learning communities, based on the work of Richard DuFour and Robert E. Eaker;
- Educational leadership, reform and change, drawing on the work of Stephen R. Covey, Robert J. Marzano, Phillip C. Schlechty, and Peter M. Senge.

The HSEs we interviewed gave mixed reviews on the quality of the training they had received. Although many of the HSEs we interviewed described the training in positive terms, others suggested that it could be deeper and more differentiated.

Support structure for HSEs. During the school year, HSEs cadre meetings are held bi-monthly for 2 1/2 days, usually over a long weekend, at a central location. In prior years, cadres met monthly, but this was honed down in 2001-2002 at the request of HSEs and the schools they serve. In addition to the bi-monthly HSE cadre meetings, HSEs meet in regional teams usually in months when the full cadre is not meeting. New HSEs are assigned a big brother/sister upon whom they may call for assistance. Nearly all HSEs who were interviewed reported making heavy use of e-mail and the HSE listserv for support and ideas.

Each HSE has an individual growth plan and submits a monthly report to the Kentucky Department of Education. In addition, each HSE is assigned a mentor from the department, who is supposed to make contact four times per year; two of these contacts should be site visits. At the time of our school visits in

January and February 2002, most HSEs had received one visit from their mentors; some had not yet been visited. The bulk of these contacts (with 37 of 49 HSEs) fall on two KDE staff members. With the exception of the mentoring program, the majority of HSEs interviewed described the support structure as strong, and KDE staff as supportive and responsive.

Most HSEs praised the support they received. One said: *"The most help we get is from each other."* Another lauded the support for new HSEs:

You have a big brother or sister who is a second year HSE. I have absolutely used that person. I have called her one of those evenings when you are crying and nothing is going right, and we talked for awhile. We can stay up all night talking when we are at meetings.

In their written responses to KDE questions, some HSEs indicated they would like to work in teams so that they could more readily call on others who had expertise they lacked. Several would have liked a teammate for moral support as well, especially those in more difficult situations. The HSEs we interviewed who worked in districts with several Level 3 schools had access to this type of team support, but those in more isolated situations did not. A number of HSEs live in hotels during the week or commute very long distances, resulting in extremely long days. Hence, some lack the support of friends and family as they do their work.

Overall, we found that KDE is still able to attract well-qualified candidates to HSE positions, although KDE staff note that they need to keep publicizing the program to attract strong applicants. From the HSEs, we learned that training could be more differentiated depending on the HSE's background. For example, HSEs who were teachers felt less

comfortable working with the principal than did their colleagues who came from administrative positions. Conversely, HSE with administrator backgrounds felt out of their element in working directly with classroom teachers on issues of curriculum and instruction. We also found that training focused on generic concepts and skills, independent of grade level and subject area.

What HSEs Do

Highly Skilled Educators face a huge task when they walk into a school labeled Level 3 (in decline and lowest-performing). The parameters of their work are set by the Scholastic Audit. We learned from our interviews with HSEs that having the results of an Audit conducted by an external team prior to their arrival is an improvement over the former system of conducting their own needs assessment. In their view, it lends more credibility to the results and frees the HSE from the onus of identifying the problems.

However, the scope of the Audit is broad, covering nine major categories and often resulting in reports of 75-100 pages. Moreover, much of the challenge of the work, according to the HSEs, lies in dealing with less tangible issues of developing trust and working with teachers and principals who hold low expectations for students and are resistant to changing their behaviors.

HSE activities were remarkably similar across the sample schools, falling into the following major categories (which overlap substantially with the audit categories):

- Professional development
- Curriculum alignment
- Classroom instruction
- Test preparation
- Leadership
- School organization and decision-making
- Resource procurement

Generally, the HSE was the primary organizer and provider or broker of professional development in the school. The kinds of school-based professional development described by teachers and HSEs were often embedded in school structures (for instance, faculty meetings or team meetings), tied to curriculum and instruction, and flowed from the Scholastic Audit and Consolidated Plan. Professional development planned or presented by HSEs varied somewhat from one school to the next, although most HSEs facilitated sessions on analysis of test data, curriculum alignment, and classroom test preparation activities. Some HSEs also conducted or arranged professional development sessions focused on instructional strategies in specific content areas, depending on the school's needs; multiple intelligences and learning styles; and equity issues.

All the HSEs appeared to function as curriculum coordinators, and curriculum alignment continues to be a significant activity in each school. Alignment activities led by HSEs usually focused on coverage, ensuring that each topic likely to be tested had been covered prior to testing and that there was minimal unnecessary duplication across grade levels. In a few cases, curriculum alignment referred to a deeper analysis that went beyond the topic to include unit development and discussion of instructional strategies and classroom assessments.

HSE work in classrooms often revolved around test preparation activities or focused on instructional strategies in tested content areas. In about half of the study schools it was clear that the HSEs worked in classrooms mostly in the testing grades, while in at least four of the schools the HSEs said that they worked in classrooms at all grade levels (sometimes particularly with new teachers or teachers identified as having specific needs). HSEs typically gave feedback to teachers on their instruction and offered suggestions on curriculum and lesson planning.

TABLE 2
FREQUENCY OF TYPES OF INSTRUCTIONAL
ASSISTANCE RECEIVED BY TEACHERS (n=256)

| Percent of teachers who: | Never | 1-2 times | 3-4 times | 5 or more |
|--|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Received feedback on performance from HSE | 34.8 | 27.0 | 21.1 | 17.2 |
| Observed in other teachers' classrooms | 66.7 | 18.4 | 6.3 | 8.6 |
| Had an HSE teach a lesson in your classroom | 72.7 | 19.6 | 5.1 | 2.8 |
| Received suggestions for curriculum units or lessons plans from HSEs | 30.0 | 26.8 | 25.7 | 17.5 |

Table 2 indicates that roughly two-thirds of the teachers responding to our survey received feedback from the HSE on their performance and received suggestions on curriculum units or lessons at least once. Of the total, 17 percent received a lot of attention from the HSE. Fewer than one-third had an HSE model a lesson or observed in another teacher's classroom (usually at the suggestion of the HSE). Most of these teachers were observed or observed others only once or twice.

Test preparation activities were common in all the schools, even where the HSE worked in grades other than the tested grades. These activities included preparing, administering, and analyzing the results of scrimmage tests; working with teachers and students on open-response and multiple choice questions; and working with students on portfolios. An HSE in one of the schools who concentrated on

teachers in the assessment grades described her work in classrooms:

I am in classrooms right now on a regular basis. I have a schedule set up where I go in and do CTBS-type practice tests and analyze where teachers need to work before test time. I conference with students. I have portfolio buddies that I work with every week; these students were assigned to me by the writing specialist. There are days I go in during writing classes and work with any kids I can work with. I do model lessons in classrooms...[Last year] I did a lot of modeling on assessments and rubrics, and they have picked that up so well.

A teacher in this school commented:

A part of me wishes we could benefit from her more in primary, but I know she wouldn't be here if it weren't for test results. When we go to her, she is more than willing to help us, but there is an emphasis on the testing grades.

The need to work on all nine areas of the Scholastic Audit and to focus on test preparation resulted in limited attention to serious examination of the content to which students are exposed, to student work, and to the quality of the instruction and assignments that produced the work. More than one HSE reported that, in the final semester of their second year in these Level 3 schools, they were only just beginning to devote attention to helping teachers analyze their students' work and adjust instruction accordingly.

Learning to shift instruction from 'stand and deliver' to engaging activities for students and to differentiate instruction based on student needs takes considerable time and attention. One HSE captured the complexity and challenge of what is involved in bringing about changes in classroom practice, and in finding time as an HSE to get down to the level of what students are learning:

Most of my work has been at the teacher level—I am just now getting to the student level. It had been a very recall-based curriculum. Now they are moving to writing and processing and thinking and putting kids in projects, and no one was used to it. So it produced a false freedom, so classroom management became a big issue, so I had to move into management issues, and how to manage technology, how to manage not being the one in front of the full class all the time imparting knowledge—how to facilitate kids' learning from materials. I think this is a universal problem.

HSEs reported meeting with and talking to principals daily. In some cases the HSE seemed to function as an assistant principal, and one functioned like a principal when the school went without a principal. One even reported that she “did ball games.” In other schools, there were reports of the HSE working successfully with the principal to improve leadership skills. It is striking that seven of the 11 schools had new principals. Much of the HSEs' work on leadership was indirect, through actions such as focusing grade level or faculty meetings on professional development or discussing ways to assess instruction.

HSEs appeared to spend a good deal of time helping schools organize for school improvement. Their actions typically revolved around organizing and helping implement a committee structure that corresponded to components of the school Consolidated Plan, and helping improve documentation of school improvement efforts. An SBDM council member told us:

When you ask her something, she gets the information instantly. She gets on the Internet and organizes content and gets it to you. I never see her sitting; she works and works and works.

All the HSEs we interviewed met with school councils. A teacher SBDM council member at

one school described the HSE's work with the council:

She is at SBDM meetings most every time, along with the curriculum specialist. She keeps up-to-date with what we are doing and discussing. We are revising SBDM policies, because that was one thing the audit said—some of our policies were outdated—so we are working on that, and they are helping us with that.

In one school that had recently acquired a curriculum specialist, the HSE worked closely with her, grooming her to play the HSE's role at the end of her assignment. HSEs varied in the degree to which they were able to identify someone whom they could groom to be their successor.

All HSEs reported spending a lot of time locating needed resources for professional development or classroom curriculum, often using the HSE network to find what was needed. At one school, nearly all teachers interviewed spoke highly of the HSE's efficiency in obtaining resources needed to move teachers toward a more hands-on approach to instruction. One said:

At the beginning of the year, [the HSE] offered a wish list, where we could list some resources that we have been wanting for the classroom, and she worked hard to get those things for us. I have used a lot of the things I have ordered, and the materials have helped me a lot.

Overall, most HSEs work very long days and evenings, attending meetings and various school functions on top of school-day activities, in addition to spending their own time seeking additional informational and financial resources for their schools.

Faculty Perceptions of HSEs

Overall, HSEs were appreciated and embraced by their schools. In the earlier DE study we found that initial embarrassment was quickly replaced by positive reactions in most of the case study schools. Reactions to the presence of an HSE in the current study were even more positive, although many teachers reported that they were initially fearful of being criticized by the HSE. In both studies, a small number of schools never developed a positive relationship; yet even in these schools, individual teachers reported important benefits from working with their DE or HSE.

In the HSE study schools, 85 percent of all survey respondents reported that they “believe the HSE has already had a positive effect on my school” and the same proportion “feel respected by the HSE.” Similarly, 79 percent said they “trust the HSE to do what they promise.” Responses from the DE survey were somewhat lower; closer to two-thirds of respondents were positive on each of these questions.

In eight of the 11 HSE study schools the consensus was that HSEs were non-threatening, helpful, professional, knowledgeable, well-connected, organized, and resourceful. Many of the principals and teachers we interviewed said they dreaded losing the HSE when he/she completed the assignment. One principal said simply:

She is very classy—knowledgeable and professional and practical, down to earth—intelligent with common sense. That’s why most of the staff respect her a great deal.

A teacher at another school had this to say about the HSE:

I don’t know of anyone who has had a problem with it. We were very nervous before she came; we felt someone would be watching over us waiting for us to make a mistake. She

was not like that at all. Within a few minutes of being here, she felt like part of the staff. She blended in, and yet if she sees something that is not right, she will be the first to say, “We need to fix this.” She is not really one of us, but she is too. I hate to see her go; I would love it if she just stayed.

At a school where the HSE was generally but not universally accepted by teachers, the principal reported:

By some she has been embraced, and they have welcomed all the help she can give. Others have taken the attitude of hoping she will leave them alone; they will not seek her out. [The HSE] and I have the attitude of dealing with the ones who welcome the help first. There is a grapevine in the school, so if we can help those who come to her, they will talk to the others. Because she has taken that attitude, some of the ones who were reluctant are now approaching her.

The principal at a school that had been assigned two HSEs, said that having an HSE was a good idea or not depending entirely on who the person was. He contrasted the two HSEs with whom he had worked:

[The first] HSE did not understand the way administrators have to work, and she didn’t understand line-staff relationships and the political nuances of working with teachers and getting teachers to do stuff they don’t want to do. [The current HSE] is very helpful and discusses everything with me before he does it. [The former HSE] discussed nothing and caused problems for me.

In only three of the 11 study schools did any of those we interviewed report teachers who were still actively resistant to the HSE’s help at the time we visited, although some teachers in every school did not solicit or necessarily welcome assistance. Even in the most resistant schools, those we interviewed reported that

they respected the HSE's expertise and willingness to help. For instance, in one of these "negative" schools, a teacher who valued the work of the HSE reported:

It's been hard. I've been teaching one way for 14 years. Many teachers were nervous about taking the HSE, but the SBDM [school council] saw it as an opportunity... Overall, 75 percent of teachers here will speak kindly of [the HSE]. We all dreaded the HSEs... We couldn't have asked for a better person. She made suggestions without being bossy.

In another very small school, the principal reported that only a few teachers were happy to have the HSE's help but most of the rest now "kind of tolerate" her. Even at this school all those who were interviewed clearly liked the HSE as a person and thought she helped the school by locating resources for teachers. These were by far the most negative comments we heard about the HSEs in the study schools. As the preceding comments demonstrate, we heard little but praise for the HSEs in most study schools.

Teacher Motivation and Expectations

The backbone of Kentucky's reform, and the HSE program, is the assessment-based accountability system. The underlying assumption is that the accountability system will motivate educators to do a better job. Two sources of data raise some questions about the influence of the accountability system on teachers' motivation to change and on their expectations for students. One derives from asking teachers and principals whether they believe the authority to evaluate staff and recommend dismissal should be restored. The second is based on asking teachers why their schools' test scores were low.

DEs had the authority to evaluate and recommend dismissal of faculty. HSEs currently do

not, due to the change in the assessment and accountability program. We asked HSEs and educators in the schools they served if they believed that the evaluative authority should be restored. The majority of teachers and principals did not think HSEs should have sole evaluative authority over certified staff because this would undermine their ability to create trust and offer support. However, many teachers and administrators believed HSEs should give input into teacher evaluation because they spend a great deal of time in classrooms. Four of the ten HSEs who were asked about evaluating faculty believed HSEs should have evaluative authority. Only one said unequivocally that they should not have such authority. The remaining five were uncertain or felt they should be involved in, but not totally responsible for, evaluating faculty.

On its face, it is not surprising that teachers would prefer that HSEs not have ultimate say over their jobs. However, comparing responses of teachers to DEs with evaluative authority and HSEs without such authority, we saw little difference in perceived pressure from the accountability system. In fact, teachers were highly motivated to raise test scores, and highly valued the HSEs' help in doing so. It appeared that wide spread publication of the state test scores (which occurs now), coupled with the threat of being identified as a school in need of assistance, is perceived by teachers as high-stakes, whether or not they see their jobs as threatened.

The other data source we considered in thinking about teacher motivation to change was how educators explained low test score performance. These explanations are important because they suggest the areas where educators would look for solutions. If low scores are attributed to factors over which schools have little or no influence, educators are unlikely to be motivated to change their practices. When asked why their school's test scores were low, most of those we interviewed and surveyed in both the

DE and HSE phase of the research ranked highest those factors that characterize students and their families rather than school practices. However, further exploration of the data suggested some subtle shifts in attitude, which we discuss below.

Column I in Table 3 presents the survey responses from teachers in HSE schools on which factors are a 'major' reason for the school's low test scores. Lack of parent support, students' low motivation, low effort, and low academic abilities are the top reasons given by teachers in the current HSE study. The earlier survey responses of teachers in DE schools also placed students' low motivation and low effort at the top, but the third choice was "unusually high baseline scores on the state test."

In general, faculty in the HSE schools engaged in far less criticism than in DE schools of test design or the accountability structure as a reason for their school's decline. When we visited DE schools in 1997-98, many educators complained about the structure of the accountability system in which the performance of different cohorts of students was compared from one biennium to the next. There was a strong tendency to blame declining scores on the fact that a "good class" took the test at first and then was compared with a "bad class" two years later. During the 2002 round of visits to HSE schools, there was a dramatic drop in the tendency to blame the accountability system for the school's troubles (see survey items in Table 3: "Unusually high baseline scores on state test" and "Improper administration of state test"). In interviews, as well, the "good

TABLE 3
FACTORS IDENTIFIED AS "MAJOR" REASON FOR SCHOOL'S DECLINE
AND WHETHER FACTOR IMPROVED DUE TO THE HSE (n=256)

| Reason for School's Decline in Test Scores | % who identified as major factor | % who say improved due to HSE |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Lack of parent support for academics | 77 | 36 |
| Low motivation of students | 75 | 52 |
| Low effort of students | 75 | 53 |
| Low academic abilities of students | 73 | 58 |
| Lack of incentive for students to take state test seriously | 60 | 57 |
| Lack of community support for academics | 56 | 40 |
| Lack of curriculum and instructional coordination in the school | 36 | 84 |
| Lack of information on how to prepare students to succeed on the state assessment | 25 | 80 |
| Unusually high baseline scores on state test | 23 | NA |
| Inadequate leadership in the school | 23 | 62 |
| Lack of attention to state test data | 22 | 87 |
| Inadequate teacher knowledge of effective teaching strategies | 20 | 90 |
| Inadequate teacher knowledge of curriculum content | 19 | 75 |
| Low quality of instruction | 16 | 72 |
| Improper administration of state test | 5 | NA |

class/bad class” explanation for the changes in test scores was heard in only one of the HSE study schools. The only survey item on the accountability structure that was rated a major factor by more than half the respondents was “lack of incentive for students to take the state test seriously,” a reference to the fact that teachers, not students, are held accountable for improving test scores. Generally speaking, the accountability system appeared much less of a preoccupation than it was in the DE study four years earlier.

When the research team reviewed these survey results, we were surprised at how many teachers at HSE schools attributed the school’s decline to attributes of parents and students. It had been our impression during interviews that teachers in 2002 blamed parents and students less than those in the 1998 DE study and that they were more likely to identify a combination of school and non-school factors. Our interpretation was that respondents in HSE schools in 2002 were not as much blaming students and parents as they were pointing to the real difficulties of bringing highly at-risk students to a high level of performance, while also acknowledging school factors over which they have more control.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that the same respondents reported improvements in the very attributes of students they had cited as causes of test-score declines—and at a rate almost double that of their counterparts in the earlier DE study. Over half the respondents⁶ on the HSE survey cited students’ academic abilities, effort and motivation all as areas in which “there has been improvement and it is due mainly or somewhat to the HSE.” The very areas that “explained” the decline in the first place are, in fact, areas amenable to intervention. Not surprisingly, teachers indicated that HSEs were least influential on factors outside the school: ‘parent involvement’ and ‘community support for academics.’ Conversely, teachers indicated

that HSEs had been most influential, as we discuss in Section III, in those areas that form the focus of the HSE’s work: ‘attention to state data’ and ‘knowledge of effective teaching practices’.

Teachers are also motivated by their beliefs and attitudes about what is possible. In fact, whether teachers believe students are capable of learning more—and whether they are capable of teaching them more—lies at the heart of improving practice. One teacher commented:

It starts from the teacher’s attitude toward students. Yes, we do have students who are low socioeconomic, but that is not an indicator of their intelligence. I think we have to believe they can do it, because our attitude rubs off on them. If they don’t believe that we believe in them, they will not put forth the effort. I think it is the teacher’s responsibility.

We asked teachers and HSEs whether they believed the goal of their school’s reaching proficiency by 2014 was realistic. At only three of the 11 schools was there a widely shared belief that the school would be able to achieve the goal of proficiency by 2014. HSEs struggle with how to raise teachers’ expectations of their students. As one HSE reported:

Their mission statement says all can achieve at high levels, but I don’t think they truly believe it or walk that walk. They think too many other factors enter into it. I agree to a certain point, there are factors you can’t control, but still I don’t think they give these kids the high expectations that they deserve.

A few teachers reported changes in their expectations based on exposure to student work from teachers in other schools.

I have higher expectations for the kids. I went to a writing workshop this summer taught by teachers in the district who brought in

samples of work that their kids did which showed me—it was an awakening for me. I didn't realize they could do this work. I am kind of embarrassed about that...How [could I] expect them to write when they weren't getting their basic needs met at home. But I have seen improvements.

At the same time, teachers' responses reflected the tricky line between low-expectations—deep-seated beliefs that certain students will never succeed—and a realistic appraisal of the barriers faced by students who enter school with weak skills and have little support at home for learning. One teacher said:

We are going to be the best that we can absolutely be [to reach the state goal]. It will take lower class sizes and the same opportunities for professional development that we have now. It will take people facing the hard issues, which are how are we going to impact families that are out of control, because the best curriculum in the world means nothing if [students] can't come to school ready to learn and accept teaching in some way. That is what the legislation will continue to ignore. And they [legislators] will continue to attack teachers. But the bottom line is what resources are we going to provide that will bridge the gap between dysfunctional families and schools?

The HSE at this school acknowledged the difficulties:

[Reaching the goal] is a huge task. It would be unfair to say anything less than that. I think they [teachers] truly understand where they are along the road. Maybe they can meet [the goal] if the support comes from the central office.

Summary

Ten years after its inception, the HSE program is still able to attract well-qualified candidates and to provide training and support valued by the HSEs. Their work in schools, guided by the

Scholastic Audit, spans school leadership and planning, professional development, test preparation, curriculum alignment, and instructional practices. How they allocate their time across the many areas varies by school need and HSE background. Across schools HSEs tend to focus their attention on teachers in the tested grades.

In general, we found that schools welcomed assistance from HSEs and held their HSEs in high regard. Unlike their earlier DE counterparts, HSEs do not have the authority to evaluate staff which appears to have an overall positive effect; that is, HSEs tend not to be viewed as threats. At the same time, perceived pressure from test-score accountability remains strong. Although teachers still tend to explain low test scores in terms of student and family characteristics, they attribute major changes in these very characteristics—and in curriculum and instruction—to the HSE, especially at the elementary level. Most teachers are skeptical that all students will reach proficiency by 2014, reflecting a mixture of low expectations for students and a realistic appraisal of the distance many students must travel given where they start.

III. HSE INFLUENCE AND IMPACT

Our interview and survey data illustrate a number of areas in which HSEs appear to have influenced the schools in which they worked. We have grouped these into four broad areas: curriculum and instruction (including test preparation); professional development; school leadership and organization; and test score results. Although increasing test scores is the *sine qua non*, we first look at the influence HSEs have on those areas expected to affect test scores. We conclude the chapter with a summary of respondents' suggestions for strengthening the HSE program.

Curriculum and Instruction

Teachers attribute improvement in their teaching to HSEs. As Table 3 in the preceding section indicates, teachers not only credit HSEs with improving characteristics of students such as effort and motivation but they attribute even stronger influence to HSEs in the areas of curriculum and instruction. For example, 90 percent of respondents reported that HSEs contributed to improvement in teacher knowledge of effective teaching, 84 percent credit HSEs with helping to improve curriculum and instructional coordination in the school, and 87 percent credit HSEs with increasing attention to state test data. Almost three-quarters of the respondents also attribute increases in teacher knowledge of curriculum content and the quality of instruction to the presence of the HSE, again higher in elementary than in middle schools. These are striking claims, especially in light of the fact that only a small proportion of respondents cited areas of curriculum and instruction as major factors behind the school's decline in test scores.

Our surveys asked teachers at both the DE schools visited in 1997-98 and the HSE schools visited in 2002 to identify ways in which the DE/HSE had influenced them or the school. There was a noticeable increase in the proportion of teachers identifying positive influences in HSE schools as compared to the earlier DE study, and a decrease in the proportion of teachers identifying negative influences. One plausible explanation, supported by other findings, is that the program has improved. However, differences in the samples could be the source of this difference. Another possible explanation is the fact that HSEs did not conduct formal evaluations of faculty with the possibility of recommending dismissal. Hence, they tended to be perceived entirely as facilitative and supportive in contrast to their DE predecessors, who were more often perceived as threatening.

Table 4 presents the results of asking teachers which of their practices had been influenced by the HSE. Elementary teachers perceived more influence on their instructional practices—and believed students were learning more—than their middle school counterparts.

TABLE 4
HSE INFLUENCE ON INSTRUCTION

| As a result of having an HSE in my school: | % Middle School teachers (n=141) | % Elementary School teachers (n=85) |
|--|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| My teaching strategies have improved. | 75 | 85 |
| My understanding of curriculum content has improved. | 66 | 83 |
| I spend more time collaborating with colleagues. | 62 | 76 |
| My curriculum units and lesson plans have improved. | 74 | 88 |
| My teaching is more focused on key concepts and skills. | 77 | 92 |
| I am more deliberate in my choice of teaching strategies. | 75 | 88 |
| My teaching is more focused on [state test] data than before. | 78 | 86 |
| Students are learning more. | 59 | 83 |
| School leadership has improved. | 51 | 89 |
| The whole school is more focused on improving student achievement. | 73 | 95 |

Nevertheless, two-thirds to three-quarters of middle school respondents reported that HSEs influenced the quality and choice of teaching strategies, understanding of curriculum content, and lesson planning. Almost 80 percent reported that their teaching was more focused on state test data. The biggest gaps in responses between middle and elementary concerned student learning, school leadership, and whole school focus—not the questions about one's own teaching over which teachers have more control.

In our interviews, teachers pointed to three primary ways in which HSEs influenced curriculum and instruction in their schools. First, they helped faculty align their curriculum and instruction with Kentucky's Core Content for Assessment. As one principal described: *"She introduced the teachers to the Core Content and teachers use rubrics now."*

Second, HSEs increased test preparation activities for both students (in the form of scrimmage tests, open response practice, or portfolio work) and teachers (in the form of professional development aimed at helping prepare students for the test).

Third, HSEs influenced instructional practices of individual teachers. In over half the schools, interviewees said that HSEs caused them to question, evaluate and change their practice, particularly in terms of offering more varied instructional practices and in writing instruction. For example, a middle school teacher noted:

We were doing no small group or individual work with students. We mostly lectured, you know. She's got us reading in small groups, focusing on the students, whether they are learning.

Another middle school teacher described similar shifts in activities:

We have a lot more hands-on activities for our students, and that is directly related to the HSEs. A lot of our newer teachers have had better first years simply because they had the resources; not necessarily classroom resources, but professional resources that HSEs have brought in.

An elementary teacher pointed to a significant shift in perception on the part of teachers as a result of the HSE:

Personally I feel like she has helped us take a good look at things—at the curriculum and how the kids are doing. And she always brings it back to whether the students are learning. We have thought, if we were doing our job, they were learning. And she keeps student learning as the bottom line.

Teachers consistently spoke of how much they learned from having HSEs model lessons in their classrooms. One teacher put it as follows:

The HSE position has opened my eyes to approaches, because you get into a rut and do things your way, but it helps to have them come in and show you a different way to get where you want to go. To see them work with a kid that you are pulling your hair out with, and they get something really awesome out of it, you are like, "Oh, cool, how do I do that?" Especially as a new teacher and not having seen other schools, seeing a different approach helps...I think, overall, [the HSEs] have been a great influence on us, shown us what we were lacking, and given us a format and a way to get where we want and need to go. Before we were floundering. We were trying our best, but we just didn't know how to get there.

Professional Development

We were particularly interested in HSE influence on professional development. We hypothesized that interventions in low-performing schools would be successful in the

long run to the extent that they were able to build the skills and knowledge of teachers. Without this, continuous improvement in teaching and learning after the HSE left seemed unlikely. Clearly, many of the examples cited above are forms of professional development—in fact, exemplars in that they illustrate job-embedded learning opportunities for teachers. However, this section focuses on the more formal learning opportunities that teachers tend to think of when asked about professional development.

Professional development appeared more systematic and coordinated in these schools than in those we visited in our earlier professional development research, where we found that much professional development was decided on an individual basis without explicit links to school needs. We heard about improvements in professional development in the DE schools but they were not as pervasive and as coordinated as we saw in the HSE schools. In the HSE schools, professional development was extensive, aligned with the Scholastic Audit and Consolidated Plan, and generally embedded in school structures (such as faculty meetings, team meetings, modeling in classrooms). As such, it often served to unify the faculty around common goals and experiences.

As Table 5 shows, two-thirds or more of the survey respondents saw improvement in PD activities along all the dimensions that we asked about. Over three-quarters found PD to be more focused on curriculum and instruction and on the critical needs of the school. The DE survey results followed the same pattern but the percentages were lower; only two dimensions elicited responses above 50 percent.

The primary differences between elementary and middle school teachers lie in perceptions of relevance and needs, and there seemed to be somewhat less agreement at the middle school level that professional development had become more focused on deepening understanding of curriculum content. These considerations could well be related and reflect the fact that many middle school teachers are responsible for particular subject areas and therefore have quite different needs than elementary teachers. Still, almost two-thirds believed that PD became more focused on deepening curriculum content understanding.

An elementary teacher summarized the impact of the extensive professional development in her school: *“I do think the teaching strategies are changing slowly but surely, from the professional development we have been doing.”*

TABLE 5
HSE INFLUENCE ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

| As a result of having an HSE in my school, PD activities have: | % Elementary School teachers (n=85) | % Middle School teachers (n=141) |
|--|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Become more focused on curriculum and instruction. | 93 | 82 |
| Become more focused on the critical needs of the school. | 86 | 75 |
| Become more focused on deepening my understanding of curriculum content. | 85 | 63 |
| Been planned by HSE/DE. | 76 | 75 |
| Included more follow-up activities and support. | 72 | 68 |
| Become more relevant to issues and problems I face in my classroom. | 71 | 49 |
| Not addressed my needs. | 23 | 47 |

When HSEs were asked on a questionnaire from the Kentucky Department of Education to name “the three most critical needs that should be addressed to further support the work of schools engaged in school improvement,” all 36 HSEs who responded to that question named professional development as one of the most critical needs (including leadership training for principals and teacher leaders). They also noted the need for teachers to have time to do job-embedded professional development.

Leadership/School Organization

Across the study schools, HSEs worked in different ways to build leadership, create more effective organizations, and improve the morale of the faculty. With seven of 11 principals new to their schools during the biennium, some with no prior experience in Kentucky, the HSEs’ knowledge and support had a major influence on school leadership. For example, in one school, a teacher described how the HSE helped the principal organize the school more efficiently:

The only negative thing I could say about [the principal] is his lack of organization. He means well, and he has come a long way. [The HSE] got him on track, let him know what had to be done, the things he let slip. Our school is very well organized and well run, and we are all on the same page, and I can't say we were that way before.

Table 4 reports that 89 percent of elementary teachers and 51 percent of middle school teachers believed that school leadership had improved as a result of the HSE. Clearly, HSEs are having an influence on school leadership and it is much stronger at the elementary level.

Principal—and even district—leadership can enhance or undermine the influence of the HSE. HSEs concur that principal leadership

is critical to their work. In a survey for KDE, 58 percent of HSE respondents listed principal leadership as one of the three greatest challenges they had faced. In at least two schools teachers told us that a principal actively resisted school improvement based on the Scholastic Audit, making it extremely difficult for the HSE to do an effective job. By contrast, a strong principal bolstered the work of the HSE, and in one case both teachers and the HSE attributed recent dramatic improvements in school morale and effectiveness to the principal rather than the HSE.

Districts also exert an important influence on HSE effectiveness both directly through the resources and authority they can bring to bear on solving problems and indirectly through their role in principal selection. That influence can be positive or negative. In one case the superintendent denigrated the HSE program, making it very difficult for all the HSEs in the district to do their jobs. In at least two districts with multiple HSEs, central office staff enhanced HSE effectiveness by making sure the HSEs were able to interact as a team, and in one of these instances, HSEs were assigned to the district office as well as to individual schools.

Most important, the superintendent exerts an influence on principal selection. For example, in one school in our sample, the school council favored one candidate for the principalship but knew that the superintendent favored another. The HSE suggested that the council invite the superintendent to its meeting to discuss the desirable characteristics for their new principal. As a result of that conversation, the council and the superintendent agreed on the best candidate. These examples illustrate that the effectiveness of a school intervention program such as the HSE program is greatly enhanced by having a receptive and effective principal in place, and by support from district leadership.

HSEs often played key roles in working with the SBDM council since the need to revise council policies was a frequent finding of the Scholastic Audit. As a result of their advisory role, respondents pointed to better functioning and better informed councils and, in one case, to a vastly improved principal selection process. Similarly, setting up workable committee structures was attributed in several schools to the work of the HSE.

In general, the biggest influence of the HSE on school organization was less tangible. Case study teachers and principals often referred to improved morale, to a shared school-wide focus, and to a culture of collaboration that had not previously existed. When asked to cite evidence of the impact of the HSE, one teacher noted:

I don't know if there would be hard evidence. She definitely helped the morale. It was very low after the audit came out. That was one of the most important things she did at the beginning.

Others echoed the impact on morale. A K-2 teacher said:

She has helped to improve morale because she has been very specific and honest with us. It has helped to improve morale because even though we feel testing is pressure, she has helped to see there are things you can do, kids can do this, she has become part of our staff. It is not just our responsibility, it is all of our responsibility; we are all in it together.

A high school teacher attributed to the HSE his shift from isolated practice to working with others:

She has helped me professionally, made me more aware of the importance of collaboration and working in groups. I am a loner by nature, but she has made me aware of that and I am much more agreeable to working

with people at this point. You don't have to drag me out of my room anymore.

Improved morale, better communication, and openness to collaboration all reflect a sense among many teachers that HSEs provided a focus, a stronger sense of how to get where they need to go, and supported the teachers' efforts.

Test Scores

Since schools qualified for HSEs on the basis of low scores and insufficient progress on the state test, the ultimate question for HSEs and the schools is whether their presence had an influence on test scores. Table 6 compares HSE schools with schools statewide on the 2002 CATS assessment.

TABLE 6
PERFORMANCE OF HSE AND NON-HSE SCHOOLS
ON CATS 2002 ACCOUNTABILITY INDEX

| | Non-HSE Schools Statewide | HSE Schools Statewide |
|--|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Number of schools | 1137 | 45 |
| % Meets goal | 46% | 56% |
| % Meets goal but not novice or dropout rate criteria | 3% | 4% |
| % Progressing | 12% | 11% |
| % Progressing but not meeting novice or drop-out rate criteria | 24% | 27% |
| % Declining | 7% | 2% |
| % Assistance | 8% | 0% |

Overall, the HSE schools outperformed the rest of the schools in the state. Table 6 shows that a higher proportion of HSE schools met their accountability index goal than did non-HSE schools (56 percent versus 46 percent). Correspondingly, 13 percent fewer HSE schools (2 percent compared to 15 percent) had scores that were lower than the previous biennium. In fact, no HSE school remained in need of assistance, whereas 8 percent of non-HSE schools fell into that category.

Table 7 presents average gains on the accountability index on CATS 2002. Overall, the HSE schools gained twice as much as the non-HSE schools. Much of this difference is accounted for by the striking difference in gains at the elementary level. Among middle schools, HSE and non-HSE schools gained the same amount. Statewide, HSE high schools made slightly greater gains than non-HSE high schools and combined-grade schools made gains twice as large, but the numbers of HSE schools in both these groups are quite small and therefore the gains less stable.

TABLE 7
AVERAGE GAINS OF HSE AND NON-HSE SCHOOLS
ON CATS 2002 ACCOUNTABILITY INDEX

| | Non-HSE Schools Statewide | HSE Schools Statewide |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Number of schools | 1137 | 45 |
| Average gain – All schools | 4.0 | 8 |
| Average gain – Elementary | 4.6 (n=628) | 11.9 (n=22) |
| Average gain – Middle | 3.3 (n=187) | 3.3 (n=13) |
| Average gain – High | 3.2 (n=198) | 5.0 (n=4) |
| Average gain – Combined Grade (K-8 or 8-12 or other) | 3.7 (n=124) | 8.0 (n=6) |

We wondered whether other sources of data would corroborate the results based on the CATS 2002 Accountability Index. We compared CATS results in our sample of 11 schools to our conclusions about each school based on the site visits and interviews. We found two instances in which the test score results sharply diverged from our conclusions. In one case, we observed little evidence of impact of the HSE yet the CATS scores were very high. In the other case, we were impressed by the impact of the HSE yet the school did not quite reach its goal. We also attempted to compare the CATS results to the schools' 2002 scores on the CTBS but found the data difficult to interpret. We saw no clear pattern to the gains and losses on the CTBS across subjects and grade levels in a school and no discernable relationship to the CATS data. These findings underscore the importance of relying on multiple sets of indicators, particularly for high-stakes decisions.

In the context of the HSE program, however, the fact that schools receive HSE assistance based on their CATS Accountability Index and that their success is defined in those terms, makes the CATS results the most relevant in drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of the HSE intervention. In the short run, the HSE program has a positive impact on CATS scores. We do not know whether these schools will continue on an upward trajectory. Our interview data suggest that some are more likely to than others; and, as the scores suggest, continued improvement seems more likely for elementary schools than middle and high schools. Where HSEs have been effective and able to ensure that their work is continued in some way so that the school's capacity keeps growing, scores are more likely to show continued improvement. We will not know this for several years.

Suggestions for Improvements

Several respondents, including HSEs, KDE staff, and school staff, pointed to elements of the HSE program that could be strengthened and offered some recommendations for doing so. The desirability of extending the HSE's tour of duty in some schools was mentioned frequently, along with the desire of HSEs to have access to people with expertise in specific areas. Similarly, the assignment of HSEs to other responsibilities that require them to be away from their schools was a common complaint. Finally, at present there is no formal way to evaluate the performance of the HSEs.

Varying HSE's length of assignment. Some schools need more time, especially those that have begun to make progress but are still low-performing relative to the rest of the state. Often progress over two years is fragile and easily disrupted by a change in staff or simply lack of time and attention to continuing improvement efforts. Even the most successful HSE interventions are only a beginning, not a one-time fix. Moreover, once schools have exited the HSE program, they have access to fewer resources. As one HSE put it:

I am concerned about some of the initiatives we have put in place. All the money they have to pay for those initiatives comes from being low performing. So many...are too dependent on the coach coming in, and then when you can't afford that, what do you do?

HSEs address this problem by attempting to leave behind structures, routines, and stronger leadership. Attention from RSC staff helps as well. But some schools are further along at the end of two years than are others. For those schools that are only beginning to make progress after two years, an additional one or two years of intensive assistance may be called for, with a carefully planned weaning process over this period. KDE staff recognize this need as well as the challenges it raises. KDE needs a

system for determining which schools justify a third or even a fourth year—and for determining which HSEs should continue. It also raises the question of whether it is feasible to ask HSEs' home districts to hold their jobs for more than two years. KDE might also seek additional commitments from schools and districts that include targeting resources to professional development and instructional improvement in those schools that need continued support. From the HSE point of view, it is also important to acknowledge that the stress and difficulty of the job might place limits on the number of years of service asked of them.

Creating the right mix of expertise. Schools need different kinds of expertise depending on their level and specific needs (elementary versus high school literacy, different subject areas in middle and high schools, special education, strength of administrative leadership). In addition, HSEs often feel isolated and many would like to work in teams. At the same time, HSEs recognize that the continuity of their relationship with the school is important; hence there is a trade off between a full-time individual and a team of part-timers. KDE has just implemented a plan intended to increase HSEs' access to the expertise of RSC and Frankfort-based staff. Other possible solutions include enlisting the help of roving teams for predictable short-term needs, or keeping former HSEs on call for short assignments in their areas of expertise.

Keeping HSEs on the job fulltime. HSEs are a precious commodity. As such, they are often pulled out of their schools to perform other important functions, for example, teaching in the Kentucky Leadership Academy (KLA) or conducting Scholastic Audits.

HSEs appreciate these opportunities and learn from them but end up being in their schools only two to three days per week. For some, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. For others, it is a problem. As one HSE said:

The problem is we also do other things that take us out of our schools. Like Scholastic reviews and KLA—I don't begrudge and do what they need us to do. But like I've been out of the building nine of the previous ten days so it is hard to maintain [my work here]. That is a common thing HSEs will tell you. I like doing KLA and training principals, but if our primary job is to raise test scores we need to be in the school.

This suggests KDE might consider alternative arrangements for staffing KLA, perhaps with retired DEs and HSEs. In addition, Scholastic Audits might be conducted by a core of full-time audit specialists, which would have the advantage of maintaining quality control and standardizing the audit process.

Evaluating HSE performance. Some HSEs think the program would benefit from an evaluation system. However, two problems make that difficult: (1) HSEs are employees of their districts, not KDE, so legally they cannot be evaluated by KDE, and (2) it is extremely difficult to gather evidence about the value they add to improving school performance beyond final test scores, which provide only one indicator of their impact. Basing judgments solely on CATS results does not take into account the conditions under which each HSE works. One model with the potential to address both these problems would be to strengthen the mentoring system to include more structured goal setting by the HSE which could serve as the basis for quarterly reviews. The mentor could also solicit feedback from the principal on the accomplishment of the chosen goals.

Summary

Teachers credit HSEs with helping them better prepare students for the assessment by creating opportunities to practice, embedding assessment-like activities into the curriculum, and improving alignment of the curriculum

with the assessment. Teachers also point to the HSE's influence on instruction, leading to better and more deliberate instructional strategies, at least for those with whom HSEs spend time. HSEs tend to target their attention to teachers in the tested grades. Faculties also credit HSEs with strengthening school leadership. These influences are reported by a majority of teachers at all levels, and by almost all at the elementary level.

Professional development is significantly strengthened as a result of the HSE in all schools. HSEs both organized and delivered professional development deemed more relevant to teachers' needs and created a more systematic and coordinated approach to teacher learning by embedding professional development in team, department, and faculty meetings. Faculty also credited HSEs with improving morale, creating a shared focus on student learning, and increasing collaboration among teachers.

On the state assessment, HSE schools gained twice as much as non-HSE schools overall. Almost all of this difference in improvement is accounted for by gains in the elementary schools. Ten percent more HSE schools reached their goals than non-HSE schools. And no HSE schools met the criterion for needing HSE assistance for another two years.

Finally, HSEs had several suggestions for improving the program including the option of staying in schools for more than two years and having access to those with specialized expertise (a particular subject or program).

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The goal of the HSE program is to provide assistance to the lowest performing schools in Kentucky each biennium to increase school performance. We draw four major conclusions about the program's effectiveness: (1) The HSE program is successful in achieving its primary goals in the short run; (2) Long-run success requires continued work in overcoming barriers to improvement; (3) More guidance from the state, support for students, coordination of programs, and refinements to the accountability system can increase the effectiveness of the HSE program; (4) The HSE program has had a significant impact across the state and continues to have lessons for all Kentucky schools.

1. The HSE Program is successful.

The HSE program is successful, as measured both by its own goal of increasing CATS scores and by evidence of changes inside schools. None of the 45 schools in the 2000-2002 cycle remained in the lowest third of low-performing schools (the criterion for receiving assistance) after a two-year HSE intervention. In addition, a higher percentage of HSE schools reached their CATS goal, compared to the rest of the schools in the state.

Creating a program designed to build the capacity of low-performing schools is a tall order. Kentucky's low-performing schools span all levels and all areas of the state. They reflect differences in history, leadership, and external support in their school communities and their districts. Similarly, HSEs come from vastly different sets of experiences. Yet across all these differences, we saw widespread respect for and appreciation of HSEs and their work; and we saw substantial evidence of their positive effects in the schools where they work. Moreover, compared to our earlier DE study, we observe continuing improvement in the program.

HSEs have effectively assisted schools both in the areas of curriculum and instruction and school organization. In the realm of curriculum and instruction, HSEs have been able to:

- organize the school and its structures around a common focus of improved student learning;
- coordinate and present professional development embedded in school structures and focused on school needs;
- align the curriculum to the Core Content;
- prepare students for the state test; and
- assist teachers in changing classroom practice.

In the areas of school climate and organization, HSEs have been able to:

- improve school morale;
- increase faculty collaboration;
- strengthen school leadership;
- strengthen the operation of school structures including school-based decision making councils and faculty meetings; and
- obtain resources needed for school improvement.

The areas in which HSEs are most effective vary across schools, and across teachers within schools. However, our findings were especially striking in the areas of instruction and professional development—the areas likely to have the most direct impact on student learning. Virtually all teachers reported that their instruction improved due to the presence of the HSE in their school. Also compelling, teachers credited HSEs with significant improvements in professional development.

Although the nature of HSE intervention did not differ substantially across schools, its positive impact was stronger at the elementary level, both in terms of test scores and reported effects on instruction and school organization. This result is consistent with the research literature on school reform and not surprising, given that the task is more complicated in

middle and high schools where traditions, size, and resistance—by teachers and students—are bigger impediments to change than in most elementary schools.

The HSE program necessarily involves a host of decisions and trade-offs. Kentucky's approach to assisting low-performing schools represents a set of choices about allocating scarce resources. Its current configuration of one full-time HSE assigned for at least two years to each of the 40 or more schools with the greatest need for improvement, with decreasing amounts of support for schools with less need, builds on experimentation with different configurations of assistance. The state could have chosen a very different configuration—less assistance for more schools or more intensive assistance with fewer. The evidence suggests that the current structure is a good balance between intensity of intervention and number of schools served. One indicator of this is the ability to continue to attract well-qualified candidates to the job.

2. Progress continues in overcoming challenges to long-term success.

The HSE program alone cannot solve all the problems of low-performing schools. We found that schools that had only minimal organizational capacity for reform are still struggling after two years. School and district leadership play a major role in increasing organizational capacity of schools. Across all the schools, we observed that HSEs are rarely able to spend enough time with teachers on improving and differentiating instruction based on students' needs, given competing demands on their time. Nevertheless, most schools have made great strides and have implemented structures and routines that hold promise for continuing improvement. Whether this promise can be realized after the HSE has left is still a question for many schools that have just set out on the path to improvement. These are the challenges that

the HSE program faces, as we describe below.

Organizational Capacity for Reform. The impact of HSEs is considerably weaker in schools with the most severe problems with faculty morale, school leadership, and district support—which also tend to be those in the most economically depressed areas. The three schools in which we observed the most resistance to the HSE and that clearly derived the least benefit cut across all three levels: elementary, middle, and high school. Two were in a large urban district, while one was in an impoverished rural area. All three schools appeared to lack the capacity—trust, camaraderie, willingness to take chances to get out of crisis—to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the HSE. In addition, the urban schools faced myriad problems difficult to overcome, such as magnet programs that skimmed off high achieving students, high faculty turnover, high student transience, and high percentages of special education and foreign language students. In one such rural school, which had received rewards in the past, teachers spoke of simply trying to survive from day to day, feeling beaten down by community and district disapproval as well as pressures from the state.

This finding is consistent with the consensus that emerged from a group of researchers convened by the Partnership for Kentucky Schools in 1998 (David, 1999). The researchers concurred that oftentimes the weakest schools have the least to build on. Because such schools have weak leadership and are often undesirable places to be, one result is frequent leadership and teacher turnover. More recent studies of reform also point to a lack of organizational capacity including the ability of staff to follow through with and sustain changes (Payne & Kaba 2001) and a lack of trust (Bryk & Schneider 2002).

Assigning HSEs for more years in these schools is unlikely to increase HSE success unless other conditions change. In some

cases, districts can take actions that affect the conditions of these schools. For example, in one district, one of eight elementary schools included the poorest housing projects in the community. By changing attendance zones, the district was able to create more economically balanced schools rather than one drawing predominantly from low-income families. Such a change in turn influences whether teachers and principals choose to work there.

In other cases, when the student population is a given, commitment from the district and actions to build links with the community are important elements. Ultimately, the fact is that such schools require more resources—extra time and extra services for students and their families, and a joint effort by the district, state, and the broader school community. Efforts to build community understanding of and support for school reform can be an important step in this direction; for example, the Partnership for Kentucky's Schools' pilot project to build action-oriented collaborations between communities and their schools.

Continuing to Build Leadership. KDE staff and HSEs concur that principals, and their superintendents, are critical to school improvement. Superintendents have an enormous influence on the motivation and capacity of schools to improve through their personal support, district policies (including those that influence school enrollment as illustrated above), and their role in selecting candidates for principalships. Superintendents and other district leaders can therefore enhance or undermine HSE effectiveness.

KDE has taken several steps to enhance the HSEs' work with principals by encouraging principals to enroll in the Kentucky Leadership Academy and linking principals of HSE schools through the Kentucky Principals' Network. To increase the pool of candidates for principals, KDE has designed an alternate

route to certification for HSEs who do not already have administrator certification. So far, six of eight universities have signed on to offer administrative certification to HSEs who take two or three additional required courses (including school finance and school law). These courses together with their HSE experience will fulfill the requirements for an administrative credential.

Increasing Attention to Teaching and Learning. HSEs clearly had a general impact on instructional practices according to teachers, especially at the elementary level. Moreover, some who had repeated interactions with their HSE reported significant changes in their teaching. But these were exceptions, partly due to the broad agenda of HSEs, partly to the focus on test preparation, and partly to limits of time and expertise. For example, an HSE can work closely with 10-12 teachers in an elementary school but not with 40-50 teachers in a middle or high school, many of whom are subject-matter specialists.

The importance of raising state assessment scores places higher priority on assisting teachers with the kinds of instruction most directly related to test preparation and focusing on those teachers in the heavily tested grades. Attention to state assessment scores also leads HSEs to spend time helping individual students prepare their portfolios, a strategy that certainly has immediate pay-off but precludes other capacity-building activities. Attention to the state assessment also takes precedence over helping teachers use more frequent diagnostic assessments as a basis for differentiating their instruction according to different student needs—the crux of increasing student learning.

HSEs have succeeded in increasing teachers' access to learning opportunities, largely by providing professional development themselves and embedding it in school routines such as faculty and grade level or department meetings. However, the size of the task of

shifting instruction from “teaching the subject” to “teaching students”—that is, increasing teachers’ repertoires of instructional techniques and guiding their choices by frequent diagnostic assessment of individual students—far exceeds the resources one HSE can provide.

KDE officials report that they recognize that some schools may require a third or even fourth year of assistance. In such cases, one can imagine the focus of assistance shifting in the later years to specific content areas and classroom practices, helping teachers learn better ways of doing frequent individual assessments and making inferences about appropriate instructional interventions. HSEs cannot become experts in every area but can benefit from a system that links them to other sources of expertise, such as the Regional Service Center (RSC) subject matter specialists, and to subject-based professional development opportunities for teachers. In addition, some HSE training might be targeted to specific subject areas and more emphasis on instruction for HSEs whose primary strength is administration. Below we also point to the role of the larger statewide system of guidance and support in strengthening instruction.

Sustaining the Investment. Focused school improvement efforts take time and energy above and beyond the daily operations of managing schools and teaching students. Reforms rarely take hold and persist in the absence of someone whose primary job it is to lead the effort. In some schools, principals play this role; in others, it is a designated coordinator or staff developer. In Kentucky’s lowest performing schools, the HSE plays this role. One challenge HSEs face is how to create the leadership to sustain their work after they are gone.

HSEs are more deliberate than their earlier DE counterparts in laying the groundwork for continuing improvement. They still must focus primarily on increasing test scores by the end of two years because that is the coin of the

realm—it is how the job is defined. But some HSEs have taken specific steps to build structures, traditions, and leaders who will continue their work.

Emphasizing professional development focused on classroom instruction and building it into faculty meetings and grade level or department meetings is one such step. Working closely with principals to strengthen their organizational and instructional leadership skills, including teacher evaluation and feedback, is another. HSEs also work on building leadership among teachers, especially those who have the time and inclination to take on some of the activities of the HSE. These tend to be teachers and specialists who do not have full-day teaching responsibilities.

HSEs also teach faculty members how to select programs and materials, with an eye towards what it will take in terms of time and resources to implement them over the long run. And HSEs work to strengthen existing school structures including school-based decision making councils and Consolidated Planning.

Not all HSEs take all of these steps. And even when they do, it is often the case that two years simply is not enough time to get all of these pieces in place. Whether the seeds they plant take root will mostly depend on the quality of school leadership and district support that remains after the departure of the HSE. HSE training might benefit from more emphasis on explicit strategies for sustaining the momentum, including how to build teacher leadership and select programs and materials wisely. Such efforts are already underway in 2002-2004 biennium: HSEs are expected to establish school improvement teams and relationships with local agencies and institutions of higher education, with the idea that these local teams will continue the work of the HSE.

3. More guidance and support to schools can increase HSE effectiveness.

The effectiveness of the HSE program will increase to the extent that the work is embedded in a larger system of guidance and support for teachers and students. Two years of intervention—or even three or four—are unlikely to launch a school on a course of continuous improvement in the absence of ongoing guidance and support from the district and the state. Our findings point to four areas in which such guidance and support might be strengthened:

Provide more guidance on curriculum. We see considerable time and energy still devoted to aligning the curriculum to the Core Content for Assessment which provides general guidance on the subject areas, topics, and learning goals expected to be in the curriculum. The step of translating these into a coherent curriculum across grade levels, including what is taught when and in how much depth along with how it is taught (units of study, activities, materials, instructional approaches), is left to each school. The reasoning has always been that the state sets the goals and the assessment and it is up to the school to figure out how best to accomplish the goals. Only over time has the enormity and difficulty of this task become clear. The task of ‘aligning the curriculum’ often focuses on allocating topics across grade levels, stopping short of the more complicated issues of depth and instructional strategies, particularly in low-performing schools.

HSEs are able to lead discussions of alignment beyond sorting and sequencing topics but might be able to go much further if schools had access to actual curriculum models deemed to be aligned with the state’s standards. Kentucky cannot mandate curriculum, legally or pragmatically. However, KDE might be able to pursue a middle ground that does not infringe on the rights of schools and districts

to make their own choices. This can be accomplished we believe by analyzing the best available curriculum materials, from textbooks to units of study, in terms of their match with Kentucky’s Core Content and goals. In this ways schools could choose among curricula that were officially acknowledged to be well-matched to the state’s goals. Schools would be under no obligation to choose from these but would have the knowledge of which were viewed as the best match.

Strengthen supports for students. To reach proficiency, some students may need only a different approach in the classroom; others will clearly need extra instructional time and resources, particularly those who start school well behind their peers. Helping teachers become better diagnosticians of student needs is one aspect of strengthening support for students. The other is to increase and enhance opportunities for students to learn beyond the regular school day.

Some structures are currently in place for providing extra time and support for students, chiefly through Kentucky’s Extended School Services (ESS) program. ESS, however, has too often been a traditional remedial program, after-school busy work or test preparation. Such a program could be transformed into a more challenging and enriching educational program that can be adapted to individual students based on diagnosis of their progress toward Kentucky’s learning goals and academic expectations. Summer institutes for students can provide opportunities for simultaneously helping low-performing students and strengthening the diagnostic and instructional skills of teachers. Rallying the community around the need to provide tutors and other educational opportunities can also increase opportunities for low-performing students to catch up.

Continue to coordinate disparate efforts. KDE continues to learn from each cadre of HSEs.

Plans being implemented in the 2002-2004 biennium address several of the issues identified in this report, including the need to forge stronger links among those assisting schools, the need for additional sources of expertise, and HSEs' needs to be less isolated. Specifically, KDE plans to make available a broader range of expertise to schools in need of assistance through the combined efforts of HSEs, RSC staff, and Frankfort-based staff who received three weeks of training in the summer of 2002 in preparation for this work.

KDE has also taken a number of steps to coordinate different programs and services spread across the department. By encouraging teams including principals of Level 3 schools to participate in leadership training offered by the Kentucky Leadership Academy and linking all principals of Level 3 schools through the more recently created Kentucky Principals' Network, principals have the opportunity to get coordinated support from multiple sources. As KDE launches its service team approach, coordination among HSEs, RSC staff, and Frankfort staff has the potential to leverage the impact of all of these sources of assistance. To the extent that KDE can also link these efforts with other professional development initiatives, such as the Teacher Academies⁷, the impact will be maximized.

Refine the accountability system. "Don't smile until Christmas" is the lesson all new teachers hear from their experienced colleagues who warn them to start the year with a strong hand to set the tone. Accountability systems may work in similar ways. That is, they may need to start with teeth to attract attention and set a tone, but once accountability has become part of the landscape, a harsh tone and punitive measures may be unnecessary and, in fact, get in the way later on. The threat of evaluation and dismissal of teachers by HSEs may be one example of this. DEs were initially given evaluative authority, but the HSEs we studied in 2002 did not have such authority. This

situation did not appear to lessen the motivation of faculty to raise their test scores, nor dampen their appreciation for assistance from HSEs. The publication of test scores and identification of schools receiving state intervention are perceived by teachers as high-stakes. The threat of job dismissal does not appear to intensify this pressure and, in fact, may actually lessen the potential impact of the HSE by creating anxiety and mistrust. Evaluating teacher performance remains critical, both to provide ongoing feedback for improvement purposes and, for those whose poor performance persists, to document their shortcomings. These are practices and procedures that belong to schools and their districts, but our data show some sentiment for having HSEs contribute to (but not take over) the teacher evaluation process—because they typically spend more time in teachers' classrooms than the principal. Structures might also be put in place that allow HSEs to work with superintendents to evaluate principals, given that our research and that of many others over the years has shown that school improvement will not happen without an effective principal at the helm.

A second area in which our findings have implications for the accountability system lies in the inconsistencies between different sets of test scores and, in a few cases, between CATS scores and what we saw in schools. Other longitudinal studies in Kentucky schools have also found a disjunction between what is happening in schools and their test scores (for example, Kannapel et. al., 2000). Reliance on a single measure, even with Kentucky's rich accountability index, can therefore be a misleading basis for action; and, as we saw and other researchers have noted, leads to a stronger focus on test preparation than individual student learning. (Kannapel et. al., 2001; Stecher & Barron, 1999).

The fact that CATS already incorporates multiple measures, in contrast to reliance on

a single test, is a strength of the accountability system. To bolster the test scores, Kentucky might look to two additional sources of data. One is the type produced by the Scholastic Audit, particularly if it could be administered by a trained cadre in a standardized way. An alternative is the kind of self-study used in Rhode Island that focuses exclusively on teaching and learning. The second source are measures of satisfaction, particularly of parents and the community, but also of teachers and students. Both sources would be worthy of consideration as a way to enhance the basis for judging school improvement.

4. The HSE program has implications for all Kentucky schools.

The HSE program has already had a significant impact across the state. It has spawned the Kentucky Leadership Academy, the Kentucky Principals' Network, and the Scholastic Audit. It has created a statewide network of highly trained educators. Moreover, the evolution of the program serves as a model of state policymaking that exemplifies continuous learning. Each year KDE staff improves the program based on what they have learned from prior years.

HSEs represent a significant investment both from KDE—which trains and supports them—and their home districts, which release them for two years of service to the state. Whether HSEs stay in that role for two or even three or four years, they leave with greatly enhanced skills, knowledge, and experiences. KDE has taken steps to take advantage of the skills of HSEs. One is through using them to design and lead KLA and Scholastic Audits. Another is to address the growing problem of shortages of administrators, especially principals through the alternate route to certification mentioned above.

HSEs, as well as former RSC staff, who have returned to local schools and districts repre-

sent a cadre of highly trained professionals across the state who understand the goals and operation of Kentucky's education system from the local and from the state perspective. KDE and the legislature can benefit enormously from the experiences of these educators as they seek feedback on existing initiatives and design new ones. The challenge is how to ensure that Kentucky takes advantage of their skills.

This situation creates challenges for the HSEs themselves, many of whom are now ready to take on more or different responsibilities than their prior position afforded. It also creates challenges for the districts from which the HSEs came. Superintendents may not have such positions available or may not want to place HSEs in new positions. Even when such positions are available, it can be a difficult transition for HSEs whose efforts outside their district may not be appreciated at home. In the past, this situation has led to a number of HSEs leaving their districts either to find better positions elsewhere or even leaving the system entirely to become consultants. Currently, an increasing number of superintendents appreciate the skills that these individuals bring back and seek opportunities to provide positions that take advantage of the former HSEs' new skills.

Beyond the contributions of the HSEs themselves, the critical elements that make the HSE program effective for low-performing schools are elements from which all schools in the state would benefit: organizing for action and improvement, focused attention on student achievement, multiple ways of teaching beyond teacher talk, and embedded professional development. Low-performing schools desperately need to move in these directions, but so do higher-performing schools. Not only do all schools house low-performing students who would benefit from stronger instruction, but even average and high performing students are rarely challenged to reach their capacity.

The implication here is not that resources should be diverted from the HSE program. Indeed, the opposite is true, given the need for additional years of assistance for many of the eligible schools. Rather the implication is that lessons learned about organizational improvement, useful professional development, and effective instructional practices are relevant to schools across the state as everyone struggles to ensure that all students reach their full potential.

Given the structure of Kentucky's accountability system, the HSE program brings hope and promise to schools that are substantially below the state's expectations. In contrast to many other states, the scope and quality of the HSE intervention turns what would otherwise be a punitive set of sanctions into assistance that is appreciated and has a positive impact on low-performing schools.

REFERENCES

- Bryk, A. S. & Schneider, B. L. (2002) *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement*. Chicago: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Coe, P. & Adams-Rodgers, L. (2000) *The Kentucky Leadership Academy: Training Administrators to be Instructional Leaders*. Lexington, KY: Partnership for Kentucky Schools.
- Corcoran, T. B., Passantino, C., & Gerry, G. B. (2001) *Mapping Professional Development Opportunities: A Pilot Study of Two Subjects in Three Regions in Kentucky*. Lexington, KY: Partnership for Kentucky Schools.
- David, J. L. (1999) *The Road to Improvement: Conference Report on Interventions in Low-Performing Schools*. Lexington, KY: Partnership for Kentucky Schools.
- David, J. L., Kannapel, P. J., & McDiarmid, G. W. (2000) *The Influence of Distinguished Educators of School Improvement: A Study of Kentucky's School Intervention Program*. Lexington, KY: Partnership for Kentucky Schools.
- Jones, K. & Whitford, B. L. (2000) The next generation of school accountability. In B. L. Whitford & K. Jones (Eds.), *Accountability, Assessment, and Teacher Commitment: Lessons from Kentucky's Reform Efforts*, pp. 233-246. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Kannapel, P. J., Coe, P., Aagaard, L., Moore, B. D., & Reeves, C. A. (2000). Teacher responses to rewards and sanctions: Effects of and reactions to Kentucky's high-stakes accountability program. In B. L. Whitford & K. Jones (Eds.), *Accountability, Assessment, and Teacher Commitment: Lessons from Kentucky's Reform Efforts*, pp. 127-146. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Kannapel, P. J., Aagaard, L., Coe, P., & Reeves, C. A. (2001) The impact of standards and accountability on teaching and learning in Kentucky. In Susan H. Fuhrman (Ed.), *From the Capitol to the Classroom: Standards-Based Reform in the States*, pp. 242-262. One Hundredth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McDiarmid, G. W. (1999) *Still Missing After All these Years: Understanding the Paucity of Subject-Matter Professional Development*. Lexington, KY: Partnership for Kentucky Schools.
- McDiarmid, G. W., David, J. L., Kannapel, P. J., Corcoran, T. B., & Coe, P. (1997) *Professional Development Under KERA: Meeting the Challenge. Preliminary Research Findings*. Lexington, KY: Partnership for Kentucky Schools.
- Payne, C. M. & Kaba, M. (2001) *So Much Reform, So Little Change: Building-level Obstacles to Urban School Reform*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Ruff, D., Smith, D., & Miller, L. (2000) The view from Maine: Developing learner-centered accountability in a local control state. In B. L. Whitford & K. Jones (Eds.), *Accountability, Assessment, and Teacher Commitment: Lessons from Kentucky's Reform Efforts*, pp. 163-178. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Stecher, B. & Barron, S. (1999) *Quadrennial Milepost Accountability Testing in Kentucky*. Los Angeles: National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, UCLA.

ENDNOTES

¹Reports are available at http://www.pfks.org/library/research_pd.html.

²Since the inception of KERA, the state has made increasing investments in professional development, now allocating roughly \$23 per student and placing two-thirds of that at the discretion of each school.

³We had originally planned to analyze assessment results for the DE schools two years after the intervention but changes in the state assessment made this impossible. For the current HSE schools, longer term results will not be available until fall 2004.

⁴The accountability indices now include a national norm-referenced test in addition to state test scores and non-cognitive indicators.

⁵One purpose of the surveys was to provide a more complete representation of each school's faculty than is possible in a day of interviewing. We found in all 11 cases that the survey results corroborated the case study results, which increases our confidence in generalizing from interviews of a sample of teachers.

⁶The percentages were much higher for elementary teachers (77-80 percent) than for middle (37-51 percent) suggesting that our interpretation may apply only to the elementary level.

⁷Kentucky's Teacher Academies are intended to provide intensive and long-term professional development focused on the Core Content areas.

